

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: Facilitating the Deployment of Text-to-911 and Other Next Generation 911 Applications; Framework for Next Generation 911 Deployment, PS Docket Nos. 11-153, 10-255

Any meeting where we can vote for improved public safety communications is a good meeting in my book. In an agenda filled with important matters, nothing trumps enhancing the safety of our citizens. With this item today we consider a short-term plan to enable texting to 911 and a longer-term route to include more advanced texting, pictures, and videos to 911. “Longer-term” connotes no less priority, of course, and I know my colleagues will keep these both on the front burner.

Consumers increasingly rely on – and many of them prefer – texting as a primary source of communication. Texting will become increasingly important as we harness the new tools of technology to the requirements of a safe and secure nation. We saw again recently how quickly networks get over-taxed and congested, so we must do everything we can to encourage the utilization of new technologies to report emergencies and the aftermath of those emergencies. We have to get beyond thinking about critical communications as just traditional voice and realize that consumers don’t make a lot of these distinctions among services and technologies that so often seem to fixate us and stymie us here in Washington, and especially they don’t make them when they are in trouble and need action fast. Indeed today’s consumers might rightly wonder: what’s so “next generation” about texting?

In addition to responding to consumer expectations, texting is sometimes the only safe option in cases where making a call can mean risking your life. And for the disabilities communities, texting represents an enormous and critical opportunity to protect lives and property. These communities have been forced to wait on the sidelines of the communications game for far too long, so I’m pleased to see today’s action as part of our larger effort to implement the landmark Twenty-first Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act.

We’re not trying to identify a silver bullet here. Texting is neither a total response nor a perfect tool. The record so far points out that, unlike phone calls, texts can take precious more time to get to recipients. And, importantly, they lack the automatic location information that accompanies calls to 911 and that is so important is responding to emergencies. Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) will need time and resources to build-in the capability to receive, process and respond to texts.

I would note that texting to 911 is apparently not new to this world and is actually on its way to becoming reality in other parts of the world, including Estonia, Iceland, and the United Kingdom. We have an opportunity to look at the progress in these areas and incorporate lessons learned in our own public safety strategies. I am pleased the Notice asks questions about this.

As mentioned, we also look in this item to the longer term by asking how we can enhance 911 by making use of all the technologies that the Commission has worked so hard to encourage. With smartphones taking pictures and video everywhere around us, it would be irresponsible not to offer first responders all these new tools to help them respond quickly and effectively to emergencies.

We also ask if carriers should prioritize 911 calls over all other calls when networks get overwhelmed, something we saw during the recent East Coast earthquake. I look forward to hearing about the feasibility and the good that could come from prioritization, but we must also remember that not all critical emergency communication is 911-bound. What we do not want is a system that would have the unfortunate effect of preventing us from checking on our children, parents, and other loved ones during a time of crisis. I look forward to learning more about how we can balance these important considerations.

Finally, I would note that there still lingers over all these initiatives to modernize 911 a question about the proper role for us, the FCC. I, for one, believe Job Number One here is protecting the people. We need not and should not be timid about asserting our authority in this critical area. I always look forward to hearing stakeholder viewpoints, but I am committed to the idea that we need to go beyond aspiration and beyond encouragement to doing everything we can to actually make this *happen*. Again, it is the lives and property of our citizens that are at stake.

Today's Notice explores the full range of issues, including how to educate consumers about the limitations of text to 911 and how to stay aware of changes in the tools available during times of emergency. If there are other questions we should have asked and didn't, I hope commenters will queue them up and provide responses. I am optimistic that we will find ways to address all concerns, particularly if we develop the find of fulsome record needed to do justice to this item.

My thanks to the Chairman for his continued leadership on public safety, to my colleagues for the concerns and knowledge they have consistently demonstrated, and to Admiral Barnett and the fine staff of the Public Safety Bureau for making this such a good item. My thanks as well to our public safety partners both in government and in the private sector. We will rely on your help as we move forward on a next generation 911.